

Great Smoky Mountains National Park

There is a feature, stuck smack-dab on the border of Tennessee and North Carolina that put the small towns of Tremont, Fontana, Ravensburg and Gatlinburg back on the map. It's the Great Smokey Mountains National Park.

In this park, *bored* is in no one vocabulary, because in this hunk of land, recreation never ceases. While some people backpack on the Appalachian Trail, a few camp out in the dense woods of the Smokey's. Plus, many love to hike up the over six thousand foot *Thunderhead Mountain* and picnic at the summit. Plus, the beautiful streams and ponds make a perfect home for top-class fish that proud fisherman would seek as a trophy. All types of trout and rock bass make up much of the fish population. And last in the recreation mecca, some people bike around for the stunning scenery.

To see this park, really see it, you need to get out of the GREYHOUND and use all five senses. Off its peaks awing waterfalls, including the little-known Abrahams Falls, Grotto Falls, and Hen Wallow, have amazed the eyes that seek them. The bountiful trees provide leathery bark that the elk and deer will feast on, as humans run their hands on for the feel of wilderness. The blood red raspberries and the lake blue blueberries make a feast for the animals and a tasty treat for tourists. The peaks of Smokies smell like a rainforest (they're a temperate one) and the valleys smell of pine sap and evergreens. Listening in the Smokies, now that's a real hobby. The bears sound supreme, the eagles bicker and screech, and you can hear way off in the distance, the sound of a badger digging his den.

A diversity of plants and animals can thrive in the Smokey's, including at least 30 different species of salamanders, dubbing it the "salamander capital of the world". It also has about 13 types of frogs and toads, some of them including the well known wood frog and bullfrog. In the sky, hawks dive and swoop, often returning with a prized trout and the occasional rock bass. Eagles turn fish to pulp and make frogs non-existent. But the hawks and eagles are not the only animals that can strut their stuff in this park. Everyone is on the look

out, because there are plenty of bobcats, coyotes, and black bears, 2 per square mile, ready to take down a 700 pound elk with a 5 foot antler span. But, the elk aren't nearly as bountiful, and had to be *re*-introduced in 2001.

So if you want excitement, you know where to go, Great Smokey Mountains National Park, salamander capital of the world.